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ABSTRACT

The paper traces the history of education in Nigeria before and immediately after the arrival of the colonial masters. Noted are the establishment of missinary schools and the expansion of formal education at all levels, whereas little effort was made to meet the requirements of less privileged pupils with special educational needs. Effects of improved medical services and more awareness of the disabled through such actions as the United Nations General Assembly Resolution 3447 are reviewed. Governmental policies and philosophical stances regarding such topics as mainstreaming and equalization of educational opportunities are reported. (CL)

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HISTORICAL DEVELOPMENT OF SPECIAL EDUCATION IN NIGERIA

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A brief history of the educational development in Nigeria before and immediately after the arrival of the colonial masters would enable the reader to appreciate the task ahead of this nation in providing educational services for disabled in the society.

Broadly put, the first contact between the colonial master and the Africans, naturally required a communication medium between these two groups and very soon an elite group emerged which served as a link between the "visitors" and the "host". To ensure thorough exploitation of available resources, the visitors required the assistance of the locals and such "go-betweens" needed to understand the working patterns of the colonial masters.

Before the discovery of oil, the major source of revenue for any quickly set up administration was from agricutural products such as cocoa, groundnuts, cotton, palm oil and rubber. And at this stage inadequate technological development made it impossible for a thorough exploitation of any other available rich mineral resources, such as tin, coal, bauxite, etc.

As a guesture of an apparent good intention of civilizing the locals, the colonial masters set up few schools to educate these locals in the arts of governance and mostly for the purpose of evangilisation. As the saying

particularly is, the colonialists came with a sword in one hand and the Bible in the other. Either way, the locals had to imbibe the new system. These schools that were ever established were located mostly in the southern part of the country being, the first point of contact.

As time progressed, political education set in along the line of understudying the colonial masters with a view to taking over from them. And this emerged along regional lines to cover the regions that were amalgamated to form the country's boundary, namely the East, West and North, which were initially headed by colonial governors representing the Queen of England.

Between 1914 -1960, the country had had five constitutions came in the memorable year 1960, when on the first day of October, Nigeria was granted freedom and 3 years later she was to become a Republic.

To case the administration of a country shaped more for the convenience of the colonial master than the locals, the country was divided into twelve states when in 1966, the Ministry took over power from a regional oriented set of politicians who saw themselves a regional jingoists. Seven more states were to be created later with another change in military administration to make the total number of nineteen.

It is important to note at this stage that while the

early missionaries influenced education in the southern part of the country during these early trying periods, the situation in the Northern part of the country was different. Whatever educational institutions existed here, were koranic schools which served mostly the religious ego of the people than any general social or technological purpose. Western education as brought by the colonial master was to be given second place.

Dr. Abang (The Head of Department of Special Education, University of Jos), reports that "the establishment of missionary schools at the turn of the century led to a tremendous expansion of education at all levels in the various parts of the Federation."[1] She sites examples of secondary enrollment rising from 24,000 in 1955 to 48,000 in 1960 in the South, while similarly the number rose in the worth from 84 in 1952 to 142 in 1960, with the total government expenditure for education sector during the plan period exceeding 3.2 billion Naira.

For one reason or the other, the various regimes in the country have found themselves preoccupied with the provision of education at all tiers and the introduction of the popular, though moribund, universal free Primary Education (U.P.E.) scheme in September 1976 was a gigantic programme requiring much expenditure in terms of classroom needs etc. In fact

about 150,000 classrooms were required at a total cost of about 300 million naira, while over 6,600 additional classrooms were provided for training school leavers as teachers. Enrollment of primary and secondary school pupils was expected to rise from 5 million to 11 million during the plan period. Thus put, educational needs of the nation have been on the increase and more and more has had to be put into it in terms of both material and human resources.

Implications to Special Educational Needs

While these remarkable expansion and achievements have been on in terms of meeting formal educational requirements of the society, very little attention has been paid to the provision of educational requirements for the informal training of the less priviledged pupils in our society, by the various governments.

Apart from tremendous and rather over-generous expressions of good will for the handicapped, little has been put in this direction in terms of meeting practical needs of this group in our midst. But common sense dictates that if we are to achieve any meaningful progress in this direction, goodwill is certainly not enough. It is important to recognise that the needs of the handicapped are numerous and basically the same as those that are considered normal.

In the past the situation has been such that the

slightest disability leaves a child to sometimes even die from neglect and rejection from even parents who should have thought otherwise. As experts have agreed, anybody is open to the risk of disability,may it be at birth or in old age. Little thought has been given to the fate of the disabled in the past for unjustifiable reasons.

However, the trend has changed perhaps for reasons such as these:-

(a) With educational development, scientific reasoning has come to replace superstitious beliefs and ignorance in the society.

(b) Medical services and general knowledge have improved, and people now believe that certain diseases such as smallpox which use to kill and cause visual and other forms of disability have been eradicated totally in Nigeria.

(c) The establishment of special schools, training colleges and universities with special attention to less privileged in our midst and added to the education of the public had provided a better awareness, in the public for the disabled in the country.

(d) Recently, the declaration of the decade as the period for special attention to the disabled by the United Nations has helped to educate both the "normal"

and disabled people on the best educational needs. In the declaration which was adopted on 9th December, 1978 by a United Nations General Assembly Resolution 3447 (XXX), the disabled person was termed or defined as "any person unable to ensure by himself or herself wholly or partly the necessities of a normal individual and/or social life as a result of a deficiency, either congenital or not in his or her physical or mental capabilities."[2]

The declaration made it clear that the disabled person shall not be discriminated upon on grounds of age, sex, race, religion, language, etc., and he shall have the right to social, psychological, medical, rehabilitations, educational counselling and placement services by member Nations of the U.N. In addition, the disabled also has right to social and economic security.

This declaration has far-reaching implications to Nigeria which is a member of the U.N. and has been making attempts in its own right to provide for the disabled in the society. The success of the enthusiasm, ceremony and publicity given to this declaration is yet to be assessed. However, it is clear that the public has come to realise that these less fortunate groups of beings have right to public utilities and protection and should not be seen as objects

of charity depending on individuals' goodwill. The growing interest of the media for the provision of amenities for the disabled has given due prominence to the campaign especially in this decade.

> "Recently a local radio station carried an editorial asking the government, individuals to pay more attention to education provisions. It praised institutions like Gindiri School for Blind Children for taking the lead."[3]

However, this zeal should not be allowed to die down and turn the declared decade into a mere ceremonial period. Objective planning for the success of this programme must be continuous and should be the major concern of the Nations educational managers.

At this stage it is imperative to critically look into the historical development of special education provisions in Nigeria to help assess the future prospects of the programme.

"The exact number of handicapped persons in Nigeria is not known. But estimates have been in the region of 8-9 million, composed of about 250,000 blind and various other categories of disability."[4]

In trying to provide for the disabled person, care must be taken to identify the form of disability since educational or any other form of provisions will depend on this. One of the early schools in this country for the

disabled is the School for the Blind at Gindiri, built and run by the early missionaries,and Paccelli school for the Blind in Lagos built in the early fifties, with the main aim of providing education as well as religious instructions to these blind children. Today these pioneer schools have provided ex-students of these institutions with reasonable pre-occupations and responsibilities at various levels and segments of the society.

Others over the years have become integrated into the various formal educational institutions. The level at which this integration can be said to have been achieved may be of interest to research students of education.

The Third National Development Plan in this country covering the period 1975-80, for the first time included some aspects of Special provisions for the education of the handicapped persons. And as inserted in the plan period, it is agreed that "Equalisation of educational opportunities will not have its full meaning without the creation of enough facilities for the education of the handicapped whose physical disabilities are too severe to permit their integration within normal school system. To remedy this imbalance, an efficient system of special education institutions will be established throughout the country. The Federal Government will set up very early in the period a National Council for Special Education "(Refer Federal Ministry of Informa-

tion's Republic of Nigeria National Policy on Education 1977)"[5]

It may be interesting to note that as far back as 1954, the Western Region Education Law suggested that the Minister of Education may make regulations defining the several categories of primary pupils requiring special education and make provisions as to the special methods appropriate for the education of pupils in each of the categories." [6](Legislation of the Western Region in Nigeria 1955 Supplementary Provision - Government Printer 1956).

A philosophical stance was also taken by advocating that where a child's disability is mild, he should be educated in ordinary (formal) schools, unless this was not practicable. And to ensure compliance with this system, approvals were withdrawn from schools that did not keep strictly to these provisions of the law.

Similarly, in 1962 Northern Nigerian Government gave the minister authority to provide special schools for the handicapped children and ensure adequate supply of trained teachers by providing sufficient facilities for training. In 1976, the Federal Ministry of Education gave the following provisional guidelines to states:

(1) "State Ministries of Education should be responsible for special education programmes in their states. This is to include planning, super-

vision and finance (funding of such programmes).

(2) Special Education Units should be established in each Ministry of Education and Special projects and facilities should be designed, special education officers should be specialist in one or more areas of pupil disabilities.

(3) Statistics of handicapped children should be compiled and maintained by each Ministry of Education. Apart from the types of education to be provided, the guidelines offered advice on sponsorship, conditions of service and staff qualifications."[7]

The Handicapped Education Law of 1981 in Plateau State should be seen as one other bold step in meeting the educational needs of the disabled in the state. The law provides free appropriate public education for handicapped children in Plateau State with emphasis on special education and related services designed to meet their particular needs and capabilities and for any other matters connected there with. Although the application of this law, part of which states that "no handicapped child shall be refused admission into any school in the state on grounds of his handicap as long as it is established that such handicapped child can function in the educational system adequately"[8] may not be

strict, there is certainly hope that more and more people are benefitting from such provisions daily.

The law also makes provisions for educating the handicapped in ordinary school provided that it is not established that the nature or severity of the handicap is such that the handicapped child cannot benefit from the ordinary school.

It also vests the responsibility of ascertaining which children need the special education in the local education board. In addition to ascertaining which child needs the special education provision, the local school board was expected to keep proper statistics of such children.

It also makes provision for parents to refer their children that need such special attention for identification by professionals like medical officers, psychologists, etc.

The importance of such policies and legislations on special educational planning cannot be over-emphasised for the fact that:

(a) Planning and coordination of services are guaranteed.

(b) Training curriculum development is assured.

(c) Technological and special equipment provision are brought about.

(d) Availability of statistical data is provided for

(e) Public education, cultural and religious beliefs

are brought into play. Each of these aspects can be considered in detail for clarity purposes.

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